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ABSTRACT

Intended to help reading instructors better understand the nature of reading errors, this report carefully examines one type of error--word omissions. Following a review of research in the area of omissions, the report discusses in detail the omission patterns, in context, of a single reader, then summarizes four key points about omissions demonstrated by that reader. Next, the report develops a major theoretical conclusion that omissions may be divided according to whether they are deliberate or nondeliberate. It compares the omission phenomenon to a related one, the substitution of nonwords for real words. The report then presents a categorization of the types and causes of nondeliberate omissions, followed by a discussion of the differential effect of omission on the reader's effectiveness. A discussion of how the understanding of omissions is helped by looking at the reader's retellings follows. The report concludes with a summary and the implications of the deliberate and nondeliberate theory of omissions for reading instruction. (HTH)

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Word Omissions in Reading
Deliberate and Non-Deliberate

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A Research Report

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Statement of Purpose

This series of working papers will provide a report of our current thinking and make available the work of our program to those who may be interested. It is our intent to stimulate an on-going dialogue with other professionals who share similar interests in educational theory and practice. We welcome responses from readers. Comments may be directed to the author of the paper or to the directors of the program.

Some but not all of the papers may appear in other publications in modified form. We are making this publication available at cost.

WORD OMISSIONS:

DELIBERATE AND NON-DELIBERATE

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The concept of word omissions commonly held in the professional literature is a "common sense" view. It seems so obvious that readers omit words because they don't "know" them that little attention has been given to in-depth studies of omissions or defining "knowing". Most references in the literature, apart from miscue analysis studies in more recent years, consist largely of the counting of omissions (sometimes including letter and syllable omissions) as part of a larger study of "errors" in oral reading.

One of the first references to omissions was made by Arthur Gates in 1922 who had collected "error" data but decided that a study of omissions and their causes was "scarcely relevant to his purposes" (1922, pp. 42-3). In 1925, Ruth Streitz viewed word omissions as "errors" that were the product of carelessness. She reasoned that "the making of errors is a fault which should be prevented by the teacher, or if once made, should be detected and corrected by proper exercises and drills" (p. 23). She believed that some word omissions were due to visual defects (p.23) and the term "word blindness" became a popular explanation during the 1930's for the seeming inability to recognize every word accurately. "Patients" suffering from this malady were supposedly afflicted with "a very highly selective loss of the capacity to recognize at a glance constellations of printed or written letters" (S. T. Orton, 1937, p. 37). Orton believed that many of them had "a tendency to omit entirely all the shorter words" (Orton, p. 38). Marion Monroe hypothesized that some error types may

even be "persistent within the child...whenever he attempts to read", although she saw omissions as probably due to excessive speed of reading (1932, p. 42).

Over the years a number of researchers developed categories of "errors" in oral reading almost all of which included an omissions category of some type (see Table 1). Monroe (1932) developed ten categories from the reading of children classified as "reading-defect cases" including "omissions of words" and "refusals or words aided". She developed individual profiles of errors in order to give "a measure of the child's reading performance in relation to that of average children, by indicating his deviations from the normal tendencies in error-types" (p.77). She believed that "each error-type which deviates greatly from the norm should be further analyzed, and the reason for the deviation should be determined if possible" (p. 77). Thus she tried to use patterns of errors as guides to remediation, although she admitted that some children who were severely retarded did not reveal any outstanding deviations in error patterns (pp. 77-8). Swanson (1937) developed six categories in looking at possible common elements in silent and oral reading, one of which was an omissions category that included the omissions of letters within words. Fairbanks (1937) used similar categories in studying the relationship between eye-movements and voice in the oral reading of good and poor silent readers. Madden and Pratt (1941) conducted an oral reading survey of 1154 pupils from grades 3-9 (with the aim of improving instruction), using six "error" categories including "omissions" and "refusals". They concluded that omissions and refusals could be reduced or eliminated by: slowing down the reading; asking questions that will focus on exact reading; building a larger sight vocabulary; and by giving the reader a method of word attack (p. 126). Morton (1964) included "omissions"

Table 1

Researchers' "Error" Categories As They

Relate to Miscue Analysis Categories

Researcher	Researcher's Categories	Place of Fit in Miscue Analysis Categories: Omissions	Insertions	Substitutions	Reversals
A. Gates (1922)	1) Mispronunciation of familiar words			1	
	2) Pronunciation of unfamiliar words as familiar			2	
	3) Pronunciation of part of a word				
	4) Introduction of words suggested by context		4	4	
M. Monroe (1932)	1) Faulty vowels			1*	
	2) Faulty consonants			2*	
	3) Reversals			3	3
	4) Addition of sounds			4*	
	5) Omission of sounds			5*	
	6) Substitution of words			6	
	7) Repetition of words				
	8) Addition of words		8		
	9) Omission of words	9			
	10) Refusals or words added	10			
G. Fairbanks (1937)	1) Omissions	1		1	
	2) Insertions		2	2	
	3) Mispronunciations			3	
	4) Substitutions			4	
	5) Repetitions				
D. E. Swanson (1937)	1) Substitutions			1*	
	2) Repetitions				
	3) Omissions	3*		3*	
	4) Insertions		4*	4*	
	5) Mispronunciations			5	
M. Madden & M. Pratt (1941)	1) Mispronunciations			1	
	2) Repetitions				
	3) Omitted words	3			
	4) Added words		4		
	5) Refusals (corrected omissions)	5			
	6) Reversals				6*

* Includes a focus on letters and parts of words not included in miscue analysis categories.

Table 1
(Cont'd)

Researcher	Researcher's Categories	Place of Fit in Miscue Analysis Categories			
		Omissions	Insertions	Substitutions	Reversals
J. Morton (1966)	1) Omissions	1			
	2) Substitutions			2	
	3) Errors showing the influence of preceding words	3	3	3	3
	4) Errors showing the influence of subsequent words			4	
R. Weber (1970)	1) Substitution			1	
	2) Omission	2			
	3) Insertion		3		
	4) Scramble (complex miscue)				

as one of four categories in his study of the oral reading errors of university students, and Weber (1970) found that she had to exclude word omissions from the major portion of her statistics in her investigation of first-graders' use of grammatical context in oral reading as she had no way of judging the grammatical acceptability of omissions within the preceding context of the sentence (p. 152). However, like all of the above researchers, Weber viewed omissions as "errors".

Other professionals in more recent years have maintained a traditional view of word omissions. Spache (1964) says: "Omissions of whole words, particularly among intermediate grade and older pupils, may indicate either excessive speed or a tendency to skip over unknown words" (p. 255). Fifty years after Ruth Streitz, Harris and Sipay (1975) state that "omissions usually are caused by carelessness or inattention. However, the pupil may omit words or word parts because he cannot recognize or decode them" (pp. 203-4).

The traditional view then in the literature has been that word omissions are errors that ought to be eliminated. The causes of word omissions have been seen as careless reading, reading too quickly, not knowing the word or lacking word attack skills. The underlying assumption has been that reading is an exact process that ought to be error free, and that reading consists primarily of recognizing the next word. In this paper we intend to offer a reconceptualization of word omissions based on a psycholinguistic theory of reading and scientific evidence: individual and group miscue performance.[1]

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[1]The data and examples in this article are mostly from a study, "Reading of American children whose language is a stable rural dialect of English or a language other than English" (NIE C-00-3-0087). The opinions do not necessarily reflect those of NIE. The study used eight language groups. Identification of subjects in this article shows which population in the study they are from.

D'Angelo and Wilson (1979) have made the claim that omissions are so inconsequential that they are not worth looking at. We disagree. First, their data is suspect. They have an average of a little over six miscues per child per story which means that their stories are either very short or too easy.[2] Secondly, our miscue data gathered over a decade and a half from a large number of readers of divergent backgrounds involving approximately 100,000 coded miscues indicates an approximate average omissions rate of 10%

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[1]Continued

The study utilized miscue analysis. General miscue procedure involves an oral reading of a whole story not seen by the subject beforehand. Readers are told before reading that they will not be helped during the reading and they will be asked to retell the story when they finish. They read from the original book with only a researcher present. The researcher follows the reading on a typescript containing the exact format of the text. The entire proceeding is audio-taped for later analysis. An official typescript is subsequently prepared by having two researchers independently listen to the tape with a third listening to points of disagreement. The miscues, places where observed oral responses do not match expected oral responses to the text, are then analyzed according to the Goodman Reading Miscue Analysis Taxonomy (Goodman, 1969). Codings are computer analyzed after a series of human and computer data reviews to eliminate coding errors. The resultant analysis consists of summary data for individuals and groups and contingency tables showing relationships between aspects of the process for individuals and groups.

The researcher also elicits a free retelling of the story followed by patient probing with open-ended questions designed to draw from the reader as full a representation as possible of what he/she remembers and has understood. The retelling is analyzed and scored according to a scale developed for the purpose.

In the NIE study on which most of this report is based, eight language populations were studied reading two stories each in English. They were: Texas Spanish, Arizona Navajo, Michigan Arabic, Hawaiian Samoan, Hawaiian Pidgin, Mississippi Black, Tenessee Appalachian (White), and Downeast Maine. In each population there were four second, four fourth, and four sixth grade subjects selected as average for the grade <u>in their schools</u>. A common story for each grade was read by all eight populations. Each also read a second story chosen for cultural relevance to the group. A major conclusion of the general study is that there is a common single reading process among all groups studied (Goodman, 1978, Chapter 3). That point can not be developed here. We cite subjects in this article for identification and to illustrate this process unity. At appropriate times we illustrate cultural and/or linguistic influences.

[2]In miscue analysis 25 miscues per child per story are considered minimal. We coded 50 in the major study cited in this report.

compared with total miscues. Thirdly, this omission data is providing important insights into the reading process, some of which will be shared in this report.

The psycholinguistic theory we base this reconceptualization on is that developed by Goodman. It is not possible in the context of this article to fully state this theory. That has been done elsewhere (Goodman, 1978; Singer & Ruddell, 1976). But the essentials of the theory can be stated: Reading involves tentative information processing. Readers interact with a graphic text using the strategies of sampling, predicting, confirming and correcting to construct meaning. They process graphophonic, syntactic and semantic cues simultaneously and interactively as they use these strategies. The reading process involves visual, perceptual, syntactic and semantic cycles each interlocking. Goodman has characterized the reading process as a "psycholinguistic guessing game" (Goodman, 1967). He sees proficient reading as constructing meaning with the least amount of time and effort, selectively using the fewest most productive cues to meaning.

The discussion in this paper on omissions is one of a series of such discussions which the authors are developing, based on and extending the Goodman theory through a thorough exploration of a particular reading phenomenon.

These papers are also research reports since they summarize the aspects of oral reading miscue research which deal with the phenomenon, in this case word level omission (Goodman & Goodman, 1978). But that research is naturalistic in that it deals with analysis of uncontrolled behavior of subjects tasks in which variables are uncontrolled (Guba, 1978). In reading miscue research subjects are asked to read orally whole stories taken from trade books or basal readers which they have not seen before and which are somewhat

difficult for them. The subjects are given no assistance while they read. They're told in advance they will be asked to retell when they are finished reading.

Guba (1978) has noted these ways in which naturalistic research such as ours differs from experimental:

1) Philosophical base: Naturalistic research is concerned with "describing and understanding phenomena". Experimental research deals with "facts and their relationship to one another".

2) Inquiry paradigm: Experimental research uses "laboratory control" or statistical manipulation to estimate effects of narrowly controlled variables. The naturalistic inquirer is concerned with interpreting impressions in as uncontrolled an observation of phenomena as possible, checking out impressions by "'triangulation", testing one source against another until he is satisfied that his interpretation is valid".

3) Purpose: Experimental inquiry has as its purpose the "testing of ideas in some empirically elaborated form." Naturalistic inquiry has the purpose of "the discovery of phenomena". To test relationships in phenomena the naturalistic inquirer looks for "instances in which the relationship can be observed rather than arranging for it to happen under controlled conditions" (p. 13). In our report we cite such instances to support our conclusions.

4) Stance: Experimental research is "reductionist," "imposing constraints on antecedent conditions and/or on outputs" (p.13) seeking only that information which relates to "preformulated questions and hypotheses". Naturalistic research is "expansionist" and holistic to describe and understand phenomena as wholes in "ways that reflect their complexity'.

5) Framework/design: Experimental research uses rigid designs fixed in advance and unalterable. Naturalistic research designs can only incompletely be specified in advance. It is emergent, variable, responsive "as new information is gained and new insights are formed".

6) Style: Experimental research uses an "intervention" style administering a treatment to subjects under controlled conditions. Naturalistic research style is "selective". It selects from the uncontrolled whole those aspects critical to the research purpose. Phenomena may be rare, depending when the "right combination of factors" occurs. But the naturalistic researcher waits for them to happen.

7) Reality: In experimental research reality is simple and singular. In naturalistic research reality is seen as being relative, changing, and complex.

8) Value structure: Experimental researchers view themselves as "value free." The naturalistic inquirer recognizes that his own values are very much part of his inquiry and that he needs to be explicit about them as he can." These eight, Guba calls "conceptual or theoretical differences." He offers six others which he calls operational or practical.

	Experimental	Naturalistic
Setting	Controlled environment	non-contrived environment
Context	Considered interfering: screened out	totally relevant: must be present and studied
Conditions	controlled	real world
Treatment	Stable and invariant	"continuous change is the essence of reality"
Scope	limited, molecular, as narrow as possible	molar, unlimited, everything is relevant
Methods	Objectivity judged by replicability by independent observers	objectivity judged by "confirmability: agreement among a variety of information sources"

Miscue research has all of the characteristics Guba describes and for that reason it can not usefully be reported the way experimental research is reported. It produces data, in great quantities, which can be manipulated statistically. The data and its analysis is reported in a 600 page report (Goodman & Goodman, [3] 1978). But analysis of that data is not the essence of the research; it only suggest the phenomena and the patterns of their

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[3] The principle study we discuss here had the following dimensions: 8 populations x 3 grades x 4 subjects x 2 stories of 6-14 pages each. We thus analyzed 96 different readers and 192 complete story readings. The total number of miscues analyzed was 10,690. We made 18 coding decisions per miscue so a total of 192,420 bits of information were produced. The entire miscue analysis taxonomy has been reported elsewhere (Goodman, RRQ).

relationship. The essence of the research is delineation of the process as it is revealed through convergence of all the information the study reveals. To report findings meaningfully we must go back to the original whole and illustrate the phenomena in process so that all necessary conditions will be present and properly valued. This we have done in this article. We focus on word omissions in the context in which we studied them: real readers of whole texts.

Because of the volume of the data, traditional statistical tests of significance are meaningless. If four subjects in a grade read a story and produce 200 miscues and miscue analysis results in 4,000 bits of information, that's a lot of degrees of freedom. But it's still four subjects who do not constitute a sample of a larger population, but rather four related case studies.

Our report follows this design:

1. Discussion in considerable detail of the omission patterns -- in context -- of a single reader we'll call Lucy. We have not selected her as typical. She is not. She was selected because she shows richly and in full variety, the omission phenomenon. Her reading concentrates what is found more widely scattered in other readings. At various later points we refer back to Lucy.

2. We then summarize four key points about omissions which she has demonstrated and supply additional examples to support our conclusions.

3. Next we develop a major theoretical conclusion already introduced: omissions may be divided according to whether they are deliberate or non-deliberate. We support this with further examples from Lucy and other subjects,

developing as we do so the relationship to the underlying psycholinguistic theory.

4. The following section compares the omission phenomenon to a related one, substitution of non-words for real words. Here comparative data is useful and is provided to indicate trends among readers and relative distribution of the two phenomena. But the data only tells part of the story so we go back to our protocols to illustrate the conditions in which both phenomena can be observed.

5. A short section explores the omission phenomenon among highly proficient readers to further develop and support the concepts we are building.

6. Then we present a categorization of the types and cause of nondeliberate omissions. This, of course, is a detailed taxonomy supplemental to the general miscue analysis taxonomy. In every case we provide examples to illustrate and support each category and argument.

7. In the next section we deal with the differential effect of omissions on the reader's effectiveness. We draw again on a single reader, Walter, who shows in a concentrated way what other readers also show.

8. A discussion of how the understanding of omissions is helped by looking at the readers' retellings follows.

9. We, then, summarize what we have learned.

10. We suggest, drawing on the study and our own professional values, what we believe our reconceptualization means for reading instruction.

1.0 The Omission Phenomena as Revealed by One Reader

To begin we will examine the omissions of one reader, develop a basic

frameword for a theory of omissions and continue throughout the report to refer to the omissions of other readers to build validity for the proposed theory. This is necessary procedure in reporting naturalistic research.

We will examine a fourth grade bilingual Navajo girl (who we've introduced as Lucy) reading a full story, "Freddie Miller, Scientist" (Story 51[4]). We've selected Lucy because she rather dramatically illustrates a number of key aspects of word omissions. Her word omissions are 30.8% of her miscues on this story (since her miscues per hundred words (MPHW) is 9.35 that means she had 2.9 omissions per hundred words). Her omission rate compares to an average of 10.4% omissions among 32 readers of this story. Even more interesting, Lucy herself only had 5.8% omission miscues on another story she read for the same study.

Lucy, like all readers, has these alternatives open to her at each problem point when she reads orally. (1) She can produce only words she knows are real English words. That's a little more of a problem for bilingual readers since they may lack confidence in their English vocabularies. (2) She can produce non-word approximations. (3) She can omit. (4) She can wait for someone, usually the teacher, to tell her the next word. That's perhaps the safest thing to do. In this case, however, our research procedure requires the researcher to give no help. We tell subjects beforehand they will be on their own to do the best they can, and, if they wish, to guess or go on. So Lucy eventually must choose one of the other options. These choices are those we can observe her making. After we look at what she does we can consider why she chooses the alternative she does and how that relates to the reading process and her use of it in this reading.

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[4] In this paper S will be used as an abbreviation for Story (e.g. S51). Story numbers and names are listed in the Appendix.

Here are the opening lines of the typescript:

(re-reads)
0101 ↑Poor Freddie was in terrible trouble again. He had been[5]

$expermeeting ©Elila·
0102 experimenting with his chemistry set, and Elizabeth's doll

0103 had turned green.

heartbroke
0104 His little sister was heartbroken, Freedie's mother was

reeKed exclaim
0105 angry. "You've wrecked that doll! she exclaimed.

$excreement
0106 "What queer experiment was it this time?"

She pauses after been (line 0101) for thirty seconds. The following conversation occurs between Lucy and the researcher:

Researcher: Are you thinking what that is?

Subject: Yes.

R: OK, say what you're thinking out loud, OK?

S: Yes.

R: Go ahead.

S: $expermeeting.

Then she reads through his (line 0102) and pauses again for twenty-eight seconds.

R: Say what you're thinking out loud. (25 second pause) Do you want to start again?

S: Yes.

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[5]We use a marking system developed for miscue analysis:

( ) - omission $excreement - non word (said father) - reversal

^ - insertion ©Elila Elizabeth's doll - self-correction

terrible in trouble again - substitution ↑ regression

R: OK. Why don't you start again?

Lucy rereads, repeating her prior miscue trouble, but also shifting to anger for again. She repeats her non-word for experimenting. A ten second pause comes again after his (0102).

R: Are you thinking something?

S: Yes.

R: Say what you're thinking. (25 second pause) You want to leave that out and go on?

S: Yes.

R: You can do that, too, if you want to.

Lucy continues to Elizabeth's (0102), pauses thirteen seconds, produces Elila—, and immediately self-corrects. She continues then with only a four second pause before her heartbroke/ heart broken substitution (0104). Her next short pause, only a few seconds, is accompanied by a repetition of you've before reeked (0105). A twenty second pause precedes exclaim for exclaimed (0105). The pause after what is twenty five seconds (0106).

R: If you really can't guess anything, you can leave it out an go on, but try to guess first and then if you can't, then you can go on if you want to.

Another five second pause precedes her omission of queer (0106).

After that, she shows the following pattern on lines 0201-0218. An eight second pause before correctly producing washing, six seconds before getting mixture right, sixteen seconds before omitting chemicals. After thirty-seven seconds pause before August, the researcher says "go ahead," but she says Uncle Augets, repeating the prior word. She pauses thirty seconds before Switzerland and the researcher says "Say what you're thinking." She produces $Switzland. Again after a thirty second pause and a "say what

you're thinking," she produces $comproning for comparing. Fifteen seconds pause preceeds correct production of usually.

There are a few short pauses until she comes to chemicals. Again she has a twenty-five second pause. The researcher says "Say what you're thinking;" she pauses forty seconds more; researcher says "Want to go ahead?" She says "Yes," and omits.

The next omission, allowance, follows a twenty-five second pause. Again she awaits permission to go on after the researcher suggests first saying what she thinks.

The scene is repeated three lines later with scientist's, but this time the researcher says "You can move on if you want and go on without me telling you any time you want to. OK?" She responds as usual, "Yes." After that, in the next twenty-two lines, she shows these pause patterns and omissions with no further researcher encouragement (lines 0218-0311):

Omissions by Lucy NA512 (Navajo subject number 512)

pause duration	omission	subsequent performance
10 seconds	disappointments	only instance of word
19 "	allowance	omits twice in story; on line 0805 (3rd occurrence) says al-lowance
40 "	chemistry	says $tchemister later
31 "	scientist	omits here and above, but then says $sciency
22 "	strange	substitutes strong later
15 "	unknown	only instance of word
5 "	chemicals	omits 4 times in the story
6 "	explode	only instance of word
6 "	accident	substitutes attempting later
9 "	interesting	only instance of word
20 "	husband	only instance of word
15 "	Maximillian	see below
6 "	chemicals	see above
5 "	Maximilian	omits these 2 times, then says $Mixmiller
6 "	chemist	only instance of word, but in line 0314 says $tchemister for chemistry

In this same section, she reads queer correctly after an eight second

to deliberate and develop their own strategies. Monroe's 15 seconds (1932, p. 31) before giving the word is traditionally a very long wait time. Most teachers would wait approximately 3-5 seconds and then help the reader. Children soon learn this and make full use of it in order to not risk making mistakes.

Her omission patterns are not evidence that she doesn't know words in some total sense or couldn't sound them out. What it shows is that she knows when she doesn't know. That could be true of any reader. The only thing that this pattern shows specifically related to her culture is her conformity and reluctance to choose her own strategies. The pattern does, of course, also demonstrate the difference between performance and competence as we define them. What she overtly does at any point is not what she is capable of doing (competence), but what she chooses to do in particular circumstances (performance):

2.0 The Basis for Building a Theory of Omissions

Lucy's pause patterns, her responses to the researcher, and her remarkalbe shifts, first to more frequent omission and then to virtually no omissions, illustrates several important insights:

1. Omissions can be deliberate. That is, they can come as the result of internal deliberation. We will illustrate later that they are not always deliberate.
2. When a reader deliberately chooses to omit, that's a choice between the alternatives we've mentioned above. Lucy demonstrates by her performance in the latter part of this reading that she could have produced some representation in her oral reading -- either real words or non-words -- had she chosen to do so. She demonstrates also that

she does not need the prompting she seems to expect.

3. That means that the issue in omission is not all or nothing. Lucy knows she doesn't know. But her mind is not devoid of response. She has the syntactic and semantic context to use in predicting the text; she has the graphic features, shapes and patterns to use; she has her knowledge of language and the world to draw on in building schema and constructing meaning. That's why she's not surprised when the researcher says, "Say what you're thinking."
4. Reading involves taking risks. The objective is always to get to meaning. That involves surmounting difficulties with syntax, concepts, phrasing, lexicon. Sometimes, though, instruction teaches the developing reader that accurate word identification is a necessary prerequisite or corequisite to comprehension. Deliberate omission sometimes shows a reader's preference for avoiding the risk of trying when the reader lacks confidence in the result. In other instances a reader may deliberately use omission as a positive strategy, expecting later contexts to clarify the problem.

Here's an example from a second grader:

0407 She began to sn- sniff at it. He She sniffed at its

0408 sides and its * corners.[2] She [3] thumped the

0409 camera with her white f- fur [4] paw.

Child Talking to Himself

1. "Mm! Oh..."
2. "Ah... I'll skip that"
3. "Now there's another one.. I'm gonna get that though
4. That's 'fur' right there. That words 'fur!' (Had missed 3 times previously)

This readers announces deliberate omissions. In one case he predicts later success (thumped). In another he celebrates his ultimate strategy: he had omitted fur three times before getting it right in this line.

* ↗ indicates a very long pause

3.0 Deliberate and Non-deliberate Word Omissions

Lucy's reading of the story we discussed above illustrates a phenomenon

of the reader deliberately choosing to omit words in oral reading. But many of the word omissions we observe through miscue analysis seem to be not deliberate at all. Rather they are incidental to the reading.

Here are the sentences in which Lucy's miscues occurred in the latter two thirds of the story (story 51). No pauses preceded any of them:

Line

0325 Uncle Oscar must (have) been a terrible goody-goody.

0426 He looked at the butter (and) said

0514 "In the hall closet!" come Eliza- came Elizabeth's tearful (reply)

0516 but he couldn't open

0517 the closet door, (either)

And here are the only omissions she shows in the second story (story 83):

0505 the lamb that was littlest missing lots lost its mother and cried cry "m-a-a"

0703 He had learned to tie it well, and he had learned to throw it with without

0704 missing over the round gray rocks that were where in the canyon.

0802 He was thinking about that first time.

1502 His father was standing behind him. His father . . .

While it's never possible to know for certain (unless the reader overtly says so) whether an omission is deliberate or not, these examples show several clear differences from the pattern cited above. The patterns of extended pauses are not present in non-deliberate omissions.

Often such omissions involve words read correctly without hesitation

at other places in the text. The reader's intonation usually shows no sign of a disrupted pattern inappropriate to the syntax of the text being read.

Her omission of have in line 0325 (S51) may reflect that English is her second language. That may be what's involved in omitting that in line 0802, S83.

The omission of that and in in line 704, S83, show a different pattern complicated by the substitution of where for were. She corrects in but not her substitution or the omission of that. She seems to have lost the grammatical structure or anticipated another. That's more clearly illustrated in line 1502 where she omits him as well as the sentence end, continuing into the next noun phrase which becomes the new object for the preposition behind. But she appears to realize that doesn't make sense so she regresses and corrects. Her intonation makes very clear her original syntactic prediction and her corrected one.

Only in her omissions of reply, either, and "m-a-a" does it seem possible her omissions are deliberate, and in the case of "m-a-a" and either the sentences are sensible without them.

Clearly there are important differences between deliberate and non-deliberate word omissions. This phenomenon has been noticed before in the professional literature, but usually non-deliberate omissions were considered careless oversights. Monroe (1932) in her studies of children's oral reading errors in the 1930's noticed that "many fast, fluent readers omit words which do not contribute greatly to content" (p. 83), but her advice to teachers focussed on getting readers to avoid omissions. Monroe (1932) and Madden and Pratt (1941) labeled some of our deliberate omissions as "refusals or words aided" which were defined as words "which the child refused to attempt or over which he hesitated so long (for fifteen seconds in our procedure in giving Fray's Oral Reading Paragraphs) that the word was pronounced

for him" (Monroe, 1932, p. 37).

We'll argue here that omissions, like all miscues, reflect the reading process and are often indicators of the readers' strengths in use of that process.

We refer to another reader for validation of our argument. Virginia is a second grade Navajo bilingual. Her omissions on two stories are 23.4% and 20.7%.

Her omissions show a pattern:

S68 (Henry's Choice)
Lines 0406 &
1005 C Henry said

1101 C When Henry ...

S26
0101 old Mrs. Duck

0201 C of the tree

0305 C And on she went

0801 Henry got the a shoe box and made holes

0802 RS in the lid and

0803 He write wrote Dragon House on the box.

0901 Next, Henry got a jar and made holes

0902 and in the lid

0903 He got some bugs and put them in a jar.

0503 any animals animal

1201 C Then they

0308 C My new hat is at the home house.

0309 It is in new my hat box

Table 2

Percent of Omissions and Non-Words in Word Level Miscues

	2nd Grade %'s				4th Grade %'s				6th Grade %'s			
	Standard Story		Culturally Relevant Story		Standard Story		Culturally Relevant Story		Standard Story		Culturally Relevant Story	
Groups	OM	N-W	OM	N-W	OM	N-W	OM	N-W	OM	N-W	OM	N-W
2nd Language Means	13.0	7.0	9.9	7.3	7.2	25.0	5.6	18.9	11.0	15.0	7.8	16.0
Dialect Means	11.3	5.9	11.6	7.9	13.6	17.6	10.9	8.2	9.8	11.3	6.9	11.0
Grand Means	12.2	6.5	10.8	7.6	10.4	21.3	8.3	13.6	10.4	13.2	8.4	13.5

Grand mean for omissions on standard stories = 11.0%

Grand mean for omissions on culturally relevant stories = 9.2%

Overall grand mean for omissions = 10.1%

The consistent pattern involves omissions of relatively familiar words which are either corrected or part of syntactic and semantic transformations. These are not deliberate omissions of "difficult" words. This young Navajo reader is seeking meaning and not simply naming words.

Her selective, non-deliberate omissions and the patterns of correction reveal a considerable control over English. She is in no sense a careless reader.

4.0 Non words vs. Omissions

If readers are producing deliberate omissions, we argued above that they are choosing among alternatives. The patterns of relationship between omission and non-word substitutions in our miscue research illustrate this.

As Table 2 shows, while omission percents exceed non-word percents among second graders, fourth graders and sixth graders show higher rates of non-words. Second graders seem more reluctant to produce non-words. One could argue that they omit more words because of low word recognition. We see, rather, a pattern of young readers preferring to omit rather than "sounding out" non-words, since the latter is a possible alternative.

Anwar, an Arabic-English bilingual second grader, has 26.5% omissions on S44, but only 2.6% on S68, the culturally relevant story his group read.

In S44, the words he omitted: answered*, changed, camera*, clear, corner, excited*, exclaimed*, marionette*, suddenly*, thumped, upstairs, vine, vines*. Starred items are words which occurred more than once in the text where some substitution, either non-word or real word, occurred at least once. This illustrates that this second grader is using omitting as a strategy for avoiding risk-taking. He can, and does in some instances, make an attempt at the word, but he often chooses not to do when he thinks he will be wrong.

It would be easy to say that the reason for his use of this strategy on S44 rather than S68 is simply due to more difficult vocabulary in the former. But Anwar shows these miscue examples in S68 with the word dragon:

0703 It's a dragon. (3. $drangtden 2. dres- 1. dragon)

0704 A dragon! (2. $drangtdon 1. dreg)

0705 A dragon (correct)

0706 Pet stores don't have dragons ($dawgons)

0708 baby dragons to give away ($dogKins)

Correct examples again occur in lines 0803, 0805, 0806, 0904, 0905, 0906, 1005, 1006, 1302, 1403, 140-, 1406, 1501, 1505, 1507. He abandons his correct attempt on line 0703 and tries a series of sounding out sorties, gets it right again on line 0705, then shifts to non-word attempts in two more instances, and then settles finally on dragon. He seems to have mistrusted himself, but not enough to omit.

In retelling, Anwar talks interchangeably about dragons and lizards. (In fact, the dragon was a horned lizard.)

Here are some other examples of his sounding out strategy in S68, where he prefers it to omission:

	ER (Expected Response)	OR (Observed Response)					
0705	might	1. may-ther	2. mayt ther	3. mayteuth	4. maytcoth		
0803	wrote	1. word	2. wrote	3. wrote			
1002	grandpa's	1. gardor	2. $gar	3. grandab's			
1102	grandpa	1. grant	2. grant	3. granda	4. grandpa		
1502	grandpa	1. grandpath	2. grandpa				

In a prior study, where we looked at readers of low, average and high

proficiency in grades 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, we found an interesting pattern among low proficiency readers:

Table 3

Percent of Omissions and Non-Words

by Low Readers

Grade	2L	4L	6L	8L	10L
Omissions	20.5%	16.5%	10.6%	10.7%	7.9%
Non-Words	2.4%	4.3%	8.4%	9.8%	2.5%

This pattern of decreasing omission percents and rising percents of non-words was not evident among average and high proficiency readers in that study. It shows a greater willingness to settle for producing a non-word rather than omitting. These older low proficiency readers may have learned "word attack skills" but they have also learned to produce and accept a lot of nonsense in their oral reading.

5.0 Omissions of Highly Proficient Readers

While older low proficiency readers are increasingly producing non-word substitutions and decreasing deliberate omissions, more proficient readers are opening more confidently and taking more risks.

In our 1973 study the High groups in grades 2, 4, 8, and 10 show over 20% word omissions. These percentages reflect larger proportions of less frequent miscues than less proficient readers, with word substitutions declining. Both eighth and tenth grade high proficiency readers have higher rates of omissions on the easier of the two stories they read, 22% compared to 17.6% for eighth graders; 21% compared to 16% for tenth graders. These differences demonstrate that it is non-deliberate omissions which are the great bulk of the omissions

of these high proficiency readers.

These findings would tend to be supported by the evidence supplied by Monroe (1932) who found that her "reading-defect cases" greatly exceeded a control group from the same grade in numbers of errors in most error categories, but the two categories with the least amount of difference were the "omissions of words" and "refusals and words aided" (1932, p. 58). Although this evidence appears at first to be contradictory, it indicates a trend that reveals that more proficient readers tend to make more omissions than one would expect, many of which would be non-deliberate. Swanson (1937) found that the rate of omissions between good and poor silent readers (when reading orally) were essentially the same, but it is critical to point out that his category of omissions included letter omissions and syllable omissions (substitutions or non-words in miscue analysis) as well as the omission of whole words (only 33% of total omissions). However, Swanson did note that the poor readers corrected only 10% of their omissions compared to 20% correction by the good readers (p. 49).

It is interesting in light of what has been said, to note that earlier researchers observed that omitted words were not usually difficult words. Swanson (1937, p. 49) and Fairbanks (1937, p. 95) noted that they were invariably "easy" or "common", and Madden and Pratt (1941, p. 124) found that articles and prepositions were the most frequently omitted parts of speech. It is particularly interesting to note that in spite of this evidence many reading professionals have continued to adhere to the view that omissions occur because the child does not know the word.

We continue now to use the method of "triangulation", testing one source against another, to see if there is further evidence for what is being said.

Here are the omissions of one eighth grade high proficiency reader in

our studies on Story 60 (Poison):

lines

0102 It must have been around midnight when I drove home, and as I approached the gates

0208 I parked the car and went up the five steps to the balcony,

0227 "Stop. Wait a moment, Timber." I

0228 could hardly hear what he was saying.

0233 ...don't make a noise. Take your

0234 shoes off before you coming come nearer.

0312 I couldn't understand about taking off the shoes

0330 It looked like c a bad go of malaria

Here we see the reader absorbed in the text and producing word omissions which almost look like the work of an editor. They tend to involve optional elements as in lines 102 and 208. Some involve shifts to alternate phrasing as in 227 and 234. Others involve reader predictions that take a different direction than the text as in 312 (non-corrected) and 330 (corrected). The latter shows the reader omitting go when it's used as a noun in a British idiom but then recovering and correcting.

Even when the going gets rough this reader is producing omissions but not deliberate ones. Here's her reading of a portion of an essay (S61):

242 But once we have begun drain-

243 ing uc the $Novocaine novocaine out of our popu- politi-

244 lation cians and $technocrats technocrats, installed

245 Ralph Nader as the president of

246 General Motors and Tommy

247 Smothers as the head of CBS, (C) we

248 will have to start looking inward

She omits no difficult words, producing either real words or non-word near misses. She corrects an omission only once here where she's perhaps predicted "we will start" and become aware that the text is at odds with her prediction. She goes back all the way to the beginning of the clause to correct.

Her non-words do disrupt meaning though like many confident readers she may reason (1) that she has some sense from the context of their meaning, and (2) that they may not be of much importance to the text and if they are so important they're likely to reoccur. Her preoccupation with getting overall meaning from a difficult text may contribute to her omission of deletable elements. Her attention is on meaning in what she sees as problem spots. It would be inefficient to attend to predictable aspects.

6.0 Non-deliberate Omissions: Types and Causes

Earlier we argued that one type of omission is deliberate. We classified all others as non-deliberate and suggested some ways of detecting which ones are not deliberate.

"Non-deliberate" only indicates, however, what such miscues are not. But non-deliberate miscues include a wide range of different phenomena. What they have in common is that they are incidental to the reading process. The reader is interacting with a text and, in oral reading, producing an oral representation of the reader's variation on the text. That observable oral representation, in miscue analysis, is compared with an expected response to the text (not the text itself since that is in written form). Words or word sequences may be present in the expected response, but not in the observed response. These appear to be omissions and it is only in that

apparent sense that we classify them as such. But what they represent is the on-going result of an on-going process. Like all miscues they provide dramatic insight into what the reader is doing that produces these results. But that means we must not stop our analysis at a superficial level.

We can demonstrate this phenomenon by categorizing some of the omissions subjects in our studies have produced in terms of the common syntactic and semantic text features and effects on the text they involve.

It is not possible to support these categories by simply producing tables of statistics. Because we are interested in the whole picture, we will continue to illustrate by citing examples as they occur in the naturalistic setting.

6.1 Omissions Incidental to Complex Miscues All substitutions in reading are simultaneous omissions and insertions. When a substitution is on a word level, that is one word for another, that's a relatively simple phenomenon to deal with. But readers often process in such a way that there is no simple word for word substitution or matching number of words in ER (expected response) and OR (observed response).

Consider these examples:

OR before coming nearer

ER before you come nearer

OR Once, however, he forgot himself and looked at the butter saying...

ER Once, however, he forgot himself; he looked at the butter and said...

Both of these examples involve shifts from one syntactic structure to another with no change in the meaning. In the first, you is omitted; in

the second, and is omitted. But neither belongs in the transformed structure; in fact, many syntactic structures require omission of deep structure elements. What looks like a substitution of and for he is really a transformation of one kind of conjoining of clauses to another. The original text used a semi-colon to indicate close relationship of two independent clauses. The reader uses and to link these clauses which makes possible deletion of the pronoun subject he from the second clause since it is already present in the first clause.

There are three clauses in this example:

ER He forgot himself; he looked at the butter and (he) said...

OR He forgot himself and (he) looked at the butter saying...

Our subjects at all grade levels produced many variation of this type of miscue which often appeared to include omissions.

Here's an example from a rural Black sixth grader:

So (we) each (of us) got on one side...

This example of language in use demonstrates the proficiency of the reader as he moves to meaning, but in the earlier oral reading literature already cited this sentence would have been classified as containing three errors (one omission and two insertions -- all bad), thus grossly penalizing the reader.

6.2 Omission of Optional Elements. A related phenomena, also quite common, involves deletion of words which represent elements that are optional either syntactically or semantically, or both. They are optional in the sense that the author also could have chosen to leave them out with no effect on the text effectiveness.

Optional Determiners (noun markers)

we have begun draining (the) novacaine...

to dig in (the) sand...

Optional clause makers:

he thought (that) a scientist's life...

Verb particles:

Andre cried (out), "Suzanne

I came (by) to see...

sycamores leaned (out) over the water...

Intensifiers:

He liked (just) being with the boy

Omissions in reduced structures:

Cry all you want (to)!

Conjunctions:

And not only that, (but) you may be a real valuable gold mine.

Time related prepositions:

We talked (for) a while

they came (on) Saturday

Verb markers in parallel clauses:

Harv had straightened up again and (had) pulled the weenies as far as they would go.

Semantically redundant elements:

Under the (old) apple tree (prior text establishes tree is old)

The next day at noon, as (soon as) classes let out

...to tell Grandfather (all) about it

We're supposed to learn a certain number of definitions for English (class) each week.

6.3 Omissions of Unpredictable Elements Often miscues reflect the reader's surprise at unpredictable structures. These structures will often cause several readers to omit the same elements. It is not so much that they are difficult as that they are unexpected that causes the problem.

...mixing the strange (and the) unknown.

Reader 2 I want you to save half your allowance for (it each) week

Reader 1 I want (you) to save half of your allowance for (it) each week

...the school bell was (ringing), ringing...

In this sequence, most of the readers omit the:

"I'm a very busy man," he said, hanging up (the) two telephones into which he'd been talking.

It's very unusual in English to use both a determiner (the) and a quantifier (two) together. Furthermore, the usually is used with a noun already mentioned. But this is the first reference to telephones. That's because the author has reversed clauses in combining them.

He was talking into two telephones.

He hung up the two telephones

Readers frequently miscue on into here, too, because of the clumsy "into which" clause the author used to avoid ending with a preposition.

6.4 Dialect and First Language Influenced Omissions. We've already pointed

to omissions that represent dialect shifts on the part of our subjects.

Here are some examples:

...stop by and see (if) I can get some...

How('d) you know it was me? (Appalachian)

If you (are) careful (Pidgin)

You (are) just like... (Spanish)

Freddie told (how) he had fixed (Spanish)

These omissions show the influence of the reader's language on their omissions.

6.5 Omission Miscues Involving Dialogue Many omissions involve the complex structures surrounding dialogue and the dialogue's carriers (the he said's). The reader's attention must shift in written dialogue. Dialogue carriers also have a peculiar syntax.

In this example the direct quote is gone and so is the need for said:

so she (said) (") didn't don't worry, Andre(")...

This Navajo second grader does several reversals of the pattern of the dialogue carrier sometimes including omissions:

"Do you want a bird?" (his father asked.)

"Why are you taking that?" (his father asked.)

6.6 Words in Compounds Some miscues involve omitting one word in a compound:

Have you asked the police(man)?

...at the (sea)shore

She
∧ and ran (in)to the house

It may appear, from many of the examples we are citing above, that we're arguing that non-deliberate omissions don't effect meaning. Though a surprising number, in fact, don't interfere with comprehension, many do occur in situations in which meaning is partially or wholly changed or lost. What we are arguing is that the omissions are integral to the reader's quest for meaning. As such, when meaning is disrupted, they are as likely to result from a loss of comprehension as to cause it.

6.7 Omissions Involved in Prediction of Other Structures Often omissions show that the reader has in mind a structure that is not the one the writer has used:

(c) He put (it) off again

"Mr. Barnaby will see you (if you) come over right away."

When they (did, they) saw (that) the gate (open) in the fence was open.

Antone stood under the hole (whole) (in the) fence.

7.1 How Omissions Effect the Reading Process

Below are examples of a Hawaiian Pidgin fourth grader, Walter, who produced about 35% omissions of all kinds. He illustrates the many ways that omissions can be involved in the reading process. Omissions of other HP4 subjects range from 0-13.2% on either story.

This high proportion of omissions is even more interesting, considering that Walter has the lowest residual MPHW[6] on both stories. (Residual miscues are those which are neither semantically acceptable nor corrected.)

Sometimes his omissions appear to be deliberate strategy. The first three times Ahele occurs in S69 it is omitted:

"With my other son, (Ahele,) he shall one day rule...

[6]Miscues per hundred words

Liloa...said "Ahele", I want... (line 0808, 0809)

"Come with us, Ahele, your brother wants... (line 0901, 0902)

After that $Ahili is substituted for Ahele whenever it occurs.

A related strategy is omission of unusual, but dispensable words, mostly adjectives and adverbs:

The spear...stuck, quivering ...to ride the holua sled... (lines 0623, 0624)

...that dignified face... (line 0311) he saw the magnificent course (lines 1111, 1112)

looked at him keenly (lines 0612, 0613) a handsome elderly man (lines 0303, 0304)

Guards, courtiers, and members of the royal family...(lines 0520,0521)

But there are omission miscues which cannot be deliberate but reflect the reader's preoccupation with meaning rather than words:

Then the next morning his father would say... (S51, line 0318)

...the small battery he had intended to use... (S51, line 0603)

...he couldn't open the closet door... (S51, lines 0516, 0517)

by the one main road (S69, line 0113)

the sparkling blue and green of the ocean (S69, line 1201, 1202)

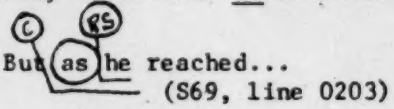
...sped down the green track... (S69, line 1222)

...touched the ground again on the smooth grass... (S69, lines 1431, 1432)

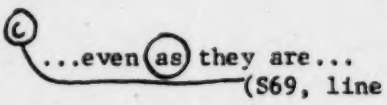
...he put out his hand...(s69, lines 1516, 1517)

Standing between them, the king put his arms around their shoulders... (S69, lines 0813, 0814, 0815)

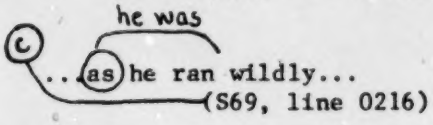
There are times when word omissions either reflect or cause loss of meaning. Walter seems to have trouble with some clause dependencies, particularly those with as as clause markers:



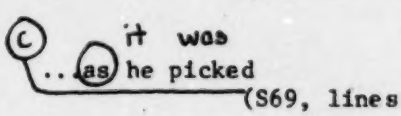
(S69, line 0203)



(S69, line 0533)

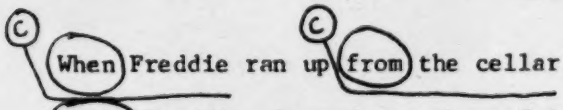


(S69, line 0216)



(S69, lines 0104, 0105)

It was repeated again and again as Each ^ each sled was... (S69, lines 1502, 1503)

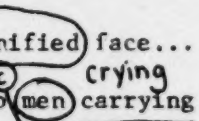


(S51, line 0511)

(S51, lines 0307, 0308)

In all these examples, corrections or adjustments preserve meaning, but not all of Walter's omission miscues cause no loss of meaning:

One glance at the dignified face... (S69, lines 0310, 0311)



(S69, lines 0716, 0717)

...that was dark and cloudy, and had a queer smell. (S51, lines 0226, 0227)

after the cut in his allowance (S51, line 0219)

If this pattern of Walter's omissions has a relationship to Pidgin it may be in the difference in clause structure reflected in the as clauses above. But the rest of his omissions seem to reflect strategies for getting to meaning and coping with unfamiliar terms.

As might be expected, he produces only five non-words in both stories combined. That compares with 17-34% on S51 for his peers and 9.8-20.4%

on S69.

8.1 Omissions and Retellings

Those who have used the tapes from the Reading Miscue Inventory kit (1972), will recall John, who never reads the word oxygen in the story Space Pet saying in the retelling "he didn't have enough oxygen -- oxygen, that's that word I couldn't get."

Alicia, a Spanish-English bilingual sixth grader, shows deliberate omission of some words that look hard. Here's a sequence with examples from S53:

0201 So education it was! I opened the dictionary and picked

0202 out a word that sounded good. "Philosophical!" I yelled.

0203 Might as well study word meanings first. "Philosophical:

0204 showing calmness and courage in the face of ill fortune."

0205 I mean I really yelled it. I guess a fellow has to work off

0206 steam once in a while.

She uses this strategy less as the story progresses, though she omits philosophical all of the seven times it occurs. Still she is able to deal with the principal concept involved in the retelling -- the unusualness of a baby saying big words (such as philosophical):

"He put his finger at Andrew and told him to say daa, he didn't say daa, he said another word and then he was surprised I guess and went and sat down with his legs open and his hands pointing at Andrew's big brother."

The researcher asks her "Were there any other words that gave you trouble?"

S: I had trouble with this one (pointing to education, which she omitted all three times it occurred).

R: What is it?

S: I said it, oh how'd it go (pause) ed-, edu-, $editjuct-, I mean $edujution - something...

R: What does it mean?

S: With school, something with school.

Two points are demonstrated here. Her intentional omissions do not mean she has no idea what the word would sound like. Neither do they mean she has no idea of the meaning. This type of omission is a strategy for avoiding risk-taking when she's afraid she'll be wrong.

Though our subjects don't always oblige us by using words in their retellings they've omitted in reading or by discussing their omissions, still we get insights from retellings to support our conclusions from the reading. Furthermore, readers' retellings do show that story comprehension is rarely effected by omission of some key word. Rarely is a single word crucial to comprehension of a story in any case.

Neither omission nor non-word substitution can be assumed to leave the reader with no sense of meaning. Here are two examples from retellings:

Example: Excerpt from an Arab sixth grader retelling Fareedah's Carpet:

R: Where did she weave the carpet?

S: In the $grelo. I forgot the name of it.

R: Can you describe it to me?

S: Well, it's like a tent.

Example: Excerpt from an Appalachian sixth grader retelling My Brother Is A Genius

S: Well, he said that big old, long word -- Ph-p- (pause). I couldn't pronounce that.

Example: Excerpt from Rural Black sixth grader retelling My Brother Is A Genius

S: ...Andrew started sayin' some words like "Super" -- I can't say that word. Anyway, he started sayin' some words...

9.1 So What Should We Make of Omissions?

We've demonstrated, or rather the readers in our studies have demonstrated, that omissions are complex manifestations of the reading process, the strategies readers use, and their decision making as they read.

Omissions provide useful information for an insightful observer on what's going on as the reader responds -- or chooses not to respond -- to print.

D'Angelo and Wilson (1979) would have us shutting ourselves off from the data that provides such valuable insights. They would also want us to ignore the fact that some readers don't make omission miscues. Unlike D'Angelo and Wilson, we believe that miscues tell us more about the readers' strengths than their weaknesses.

Our readers have adequately demonstrated here that the common sense view of omissions as the inability to respond to an unknown word or lack of "word attack skills" is simply wrong.

This evidence also contradicts the traditional view that omissions are due simply to carelessness by skipping over the word. It is interesting to note that Fairbanks discovered in 1937 that eye-fixation during oral reading was "equally precise when an error was made as when it was not" (p. 96).

Are omissions bad? No, not per se. In fact, many are non-deliberate and show the readers' strengths in constructing meaning from text. Even the strategy of deliberate omission may have value if it avoids undue preoccupation with minor text elements that subsequent text may clarify. Certainly some omission patterns can be indicative of readers' problems. Very young readers sometimes omit more words than they read, sometimes announcing "we haven't had that word yet". That represents the children's concept that reading is reading words and that they are only responsible for reading words explicitly "taught".

Sometimes omission patterns represent a strong reluctance to take risks, as Lucy illustrated in the second portion of her reading.

Other omission patterns reflect the reader's general problems in dealing with the syntactic or semantic structures of the text.

Omissions and patterns of omission, then, need interpretation. That interpretation must be on the basis of some understanding of reading as a process in which the reader interacts with print to create meaning. Counting omissions is of little use. Attempts such as Monroe's to develop norms of omissions and other "error" patterns will never provide much insight. They overlook the effect on rate of miscues of such factors as type of instruction, variation in reading materials, etc. We must see their significance in relationship to the whole process. We must see them as surface representations of an underlying interaction between the reader and the text.

One can not argue in a general sense that it is better to produce something, if only a sounded-out non-word, than to omit.

There are values in some patterns of non-word substitutions. Non-words often retain the affixes, particularly the grammatical ones, of the original word. That makes them useful placeholders for the original word

and makes it possible for the reader to keep control of the syntactic patterns of the text. They also can represent a greater willingness to take risks in reading. But often patterns of non-word substitutions reflect the readers losing themselves in trying to get the words right. As problems occur they settle for phonic approximations, often after several attempts at each occurrence. A lot of energy is expended with little positive results.

Here are examples from one eighth grade low proficiency reader:

5. $ pacificate
4. $ pacific
3. $ pacific
2. $ Pa-
S53 1. $ Pa-
0202 "Philosophical," I yelled.

6. $ defice
5. $ defize
4. $ difis-
3. $ dignif-
2. $ digni-
1. $ de-
0214 to remember the word definitions

2. $ pacificated
1. $Spacific
0203 "Philosophical,"

$ dignifashion
$ digfine
0222 number of definitions

3. $ disfitations
2. $ dis-
1. $ dis-
0703 The word definitions

These repeated attempts at each occurrence seem to reflect the reader's having accepted the view that everything depends on getting each word -- as a unit -- exactly right. So the reader tries alternate phonic matchings losing the control over integration of semantic and syntactic cues and disrupting the constructing of meaning.

Both deliberate omissions and non-word patterns can reflect what we've labeled "the next-word syndrome".

Lucy shows it in her reluctance to proceed everytime she's unsure about the next word. This syndrome is one in which readers begin to lose

the goal of meaning in reading and become overwhelmed with the task of correctly "knowing" every next word. Whatever strategies they pick, whether omission, non-word perseverence, or teacher dependency, if the pattern shows the reader unwilling to move toward meaning without correctly identifying every word, that's when a real problem may exist.

10.1 The Relationship of Reading Instruction to Omissions

Most reading instruction is geared to eliminating omissions as inherently bad. Teachers often interrupt oral readers to ask them to reread every time they omit, regardless of the context or the effect.

In diagnosis the teacher or examiner is usually told to "Pronounce word(s) when it's apparent that the child does not know the word(s)".[1] A common time limit is 5 seconds of pause.[2] Consider that in the light of patterns shown by Lucy and others; they are cut off well before they are ready to make a decision or get their courage up to take a risk. That forces them into a pattern of omission and teacher-dependency. It puts a 5 second limit on all thought processes. Every time the teacher interrupts, the reader gets the message: "You must get the word right. You can't do it without me. You've just failed one more time." Repeated small failures add up to a general sense of inadequacy and a lack of confidence in themselves as readers.

Instruction, we believe, ought to help readers to build on their own strengths, to use their own strategies for making sense from text and their own strategies for solving problems when they come to them.

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[1] Silvaroli, N. Classroom Reading Inventory, Wm. C. Brown Co., Dubuque, 1965, 1969.

[2] Mar, Frank. To Help Children Read, Columbus: Merrill, 1973, pp. 124-5.

When readers have paused at points in texts their minds should be, and usually are, engaged in processing information; graphophonic, syntactic, semantic, to get to meaning. They should be using the language and conceptual schema they have within them interactively with cues selected from the text. If the teacher cuts in after 5 seconds on the assumption that the reader does not "know" the next word, then the teacher is implicitly saying to the reader "say the word, never mind the sense".

This represents two major preoccupations in our modern technology of reading instruction, both of which are unfortunate: (1) Preoccupation by teachers and learners with words as ends in themselves. (2) Assumption that reading must, at least ultimately, be error free.

The demand for word for word accuracy shifts the reader's focus from meaning and inhibits the reader's risk taking: better omit than be wrong; better wait for the teacher than try myself; better not trust my own half-formed notions.

Reading involves tentative information processing -- guessing constantly what's coming. That makes it possible to predict, to sample, to monitor one's own reading and confirm on the basis of the developing sense, to reprocess and self-correct as needed.

Here's an example of what we mean. A second grader is reading:

"Then I will find work," said Ted.

He reads "Then I went, then I went, then I want..." He stops himself, chortles and then says more deliberately: "Then I will--" Now a long pause ensues. Not 5 seconds, but 45 seconds. What shall we assume preoccupies the reader's mind? Conventional wisdom says, "he must have stopped because he doesn't know the next word. Tell him so he can go on without being frustrated."

But now consider the alternative: Suppose there are no problems with "unknown" words here. Suppose the reader has paused because he's having trouble getting sense from the text. Find work? Could both be verbs? "You find things you lose," says his seven year old logic. You can do work, like you do school work. But find work? In prior text Ted, a boy wants money to go to the "Fair". "We haven't got a single penny to spare" says Dad. What does find work have to do with money for the Fair?

We wait for the reader to solve his own problems. And after 45 seconds of pause he does. He reads the rest of the sentence quickly and with lively intonation.

Reading instruction must not be geared to eliminating omission or to taking the risks out of reading, but helping readers solve problems for themselves.

If we encourage readers to trust themselves and to keep a concern for meaning as their constant preoccupation in reading there will probably be a decrease in deliberate omissions. But it's building the reader's self-reliance and risk-taking that's the goal of instruction, not superficially reducing deliberate omissions. In fact, our evidence has shown that confident readers will produce higher rates of non-deliberate omissions which do not disrupt meaning. Again the goal of instruction is not to increase non-deliberate omissions; it's to help readers make sense of what they read. But an oral rendition of a text which contains variations, perhaps including omissions from the expected response and still makes good sense tells the teacher a lot more about the reader's strength in comprehending than an accurate rendition which may or may not represent the reader's success in comprehending.

The silence of readers' oral word omissions can speak eloquently to insightful teachers.

APPENDIX

List of Stories Cited

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69	The Royal Race	The Magic Word (4, Macmillan, 1966)	356

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